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ABSTRACT

Fifteen University of Oregon undergraduate education majors participated in a successful 3-day program of total immersion in rural community living and teaching in Condon, Oregon. The field experience model had unique elements: (1) the course was offered as an alternative to a required course in teaching strategies and student teachers were required to prepare a full day of instruction not always in their major field of interest; (2) Condon High School faculty housed and fed the undergraduates to help them understand rural life; (3) while supervised student teachers conducted their high school classes, high school faculty attended an inservice program planned and conducted by graduate students in education. Evaluation was both objective and subjective. A semantic differential indicated that student teachers changed their views about rural schools and themselves as teachers after the experience. On questionnnaries the student teachers and high school students rated the program an overwhelming success. Condon faculty favorably assessed the inservice program and student teachers' journals revealed the importance of the experience to preservice education. Student teachers recommended extension of the experience and better planning. Evidence suggested that the model is a viable technique for introducing students to the teaching profession and specifically to the opportunities of rural schools. (SB)

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A MODEL FOR A RURAL SCHOOL FIELD EXPERIENCE

by Ray Hull and Kathryn Hegtvedt

Winter, 1979

"This has been one of the most positive, relevant and stimulating experiences that the University of Oregon School of Education has had to offer."

Penny Van Ourkerk

"It has been one of the most rewarding and enlightening experiences of my life."

Linda Muerle

Such were the sentiments contained in the journals of two undergraduate students who had just experienced three days of total immersion in rural community living and teaching. Condon, Oregon, a community of approximately 950 people in central Oregon, opened its high school to 15 undergraduate secondary education students from the University of Oregon and provided for them perhaps the richest experience of their pre-professional training.

The genesis of the venture occurred during the Oregon Small Schools Association's annual conference in the summer of 1977. At that conference Dr. Ivan Muse discussed a Brigham Young University practicum in which students receive an in-depth exposure to teaching in rural schools. This encounter was followed by some months of planning and in May of the following year, the University of Oregon version of the rural school practicum was launched. Our basic intent was to model the Brigham Young University program, but we did modify the experience in some interesting ways.

First, we offered the field-based course as an alternate to a required class in teaching strategies which is open to students at all levels in the secondary education program. Hence, while three or four of our students had completed their student teaching, most were facing a classroom for the first time. Further, although students were paired for some classes, they were responsible for preparing a full day of instruction, not always in their major field of interest. It was an immersion experience, to say the least. Second, a concurrent inservice program was provided to the Condon faculty and this was also student conducted. Dr. Richard Arends offers a series of courses at the University of Oregon intended to help graduate students in education develop skill in the design and presentation of teacher inservice. These students, under Dr. Arends' direction, planned and conducted the faculty inservice portion of the program. Third, to help our students understand the life of a teacher in a rural community, the Condon High School faculty graciously took our students into their homes, furnishing meals and housing for the duration of our visit.

The actual mechanics of the visit to Condon were not complex. University faculty and graduate students conducting the program traveled to Condon in advance to discuss scheduling and class assignments with administrators and faculty. The university students corresponded directly with the teachers at Condon and received clarification of their teaching assignment and class responsibilities. Lesson plans were prepared and reviewed as a requirement of the teaching strategies course, and final preparations for the trip were accomplished through that class during 5 weeks of class prior to the visit to Condon.

The "Condon Experience"

"Condon population--950, with us a 2% increase."

David Hood

After a five hour drive Monday morning, May 8, the University of Oregon entourage came upon the small town of Condon, nestled in the gently rolling hills of central Oregon between Fossil and Arlington. Little time passed after arrival at the town's high school before the teaching strategies students found their way around the building and made the appropriate connections with the teachers they would replace. The afternoon was spent in observation of classes, conference with teachers and last minute preparation.

That night a potluck welcomed the U. of O. delegation. Already the college students were comparing experiences. "Helpful," "friendly," "cooperative," "well-rounded" were some initial impressions of the staff and school. After dinner, students went home with their host families.

For the next three days, students conducted their classes under the supervision of university personnel while teachers participated in the concurrent inservice program. During the first day, the U. of O.students demonstrated a preference for active learning at least as a means of involvement; they employed a variety of experiential inventions to establish, set or encourage motivation. One "teacher" had her home economics class role playing non-traditional roles for women. With a box of nuts and bolts, a future biology teacher explained the concept of keys; using this assortment of props, he illustrated a questioning technique used in the determination of an object's categorization. Students in career education had to imagine a skiing accident and list medical

professionals the skier might encounter in the process of attending to a broken leg. In journalism, students witnessed a jealous woman shoot their teacher, then wrote about the crime. Freshmen communications classes viewed videotaped examples of good and bad news broadcasts and compared the two before breaking into groups to construct their own. Geometry students prepared to use the surveyor's transit. Ironically, the U. of O. students were experimenting with the same strategy or approach that Condon teachers were learning more about in the inservice which was entitled "High Schools for Active Learning."

Despite an emphasis on the experiential mode, the university students tried other teaching strategies, among them, lecture, discussion and demonstration. Meanwhile the high school students were reading, writing, participating in group and class discussion and even being tested.

A variety of sources of feedback regarding the experience were identified for purposes of assessment and evaluation. Perhaps the most insightful and revealing was that data garnered in personal journals that each of our students was asked to keep. Some student perceptions follow.

"Freshmen need something that they can be involved in, something to touch, see or hear....you should never just lecture them."

"My lesson plans were not long enough."

"My lesson went as planned but as usual, I ran out of time."

"I need to learn to work more on discussions."

"Though it was fun to make it (a test), I decided I don't like giving them. I hate it when someone doesn't do well."

"...a universal problem with math, that is students don't enjoy what they're studying and therefore don't learn effectively."

"It doesn't take much planning to be a bad teacher."

"The life of a teacher must be very challenging."

"I'm not willing to make the commitment."

"One really important thing I discovered is that I can teach."

One U. of O. student summarized his experience: "I thoroughly enjoyed being and teaching in an old fashioned community where personal relationships between students and teachers counted, and where teachers could concentrate on teaching subject matter rather than dealing with behavior problems."

Except for the absence of pronounced classroom management demands, the pre-teaching experience (affectionately coined the "Condon Experience") was as comprehensive as three days would allow. Student teachers worked hours to prepare, contributed to a cooperative effort in doing so, taught four or five classes a day, gave extra time to correcting assignments and coaching, and still had time to get to know one another, their hosts, and the character of the small community.

Evaluation and Conclusion

As stated previously, several means of evaluating the experience were identified. Both high school students and student teachers completed questionnaires following the experience. Also, at the beginning and end of the term, the university students filled out a semantic differential. Finally, while in Condon, student teachers kept journals and Condon High School staff members shared their reactions to the experience.

Although much has been extracted from the journals already, a further insight into the program's effect was most specifically revealed in that source. An unanticipated learning experience resulted from the

necessary team teaching organization. One student teacher claimed, "It's been so rewarding to team teach and gain from each other." Another explained, "If one teacher messes up..., then there is a back-up person to help out." Although most comments about the set-up were positive, finding support and other advantages in "two sources of input," by the second day, one student teacher changed her mind about the merits of team teaching: "My enthusiasm for team teaching has diminished....It would be easier to plan the whole unit yourself."

Data of an objective nature was obtained from a semantic differential instrument administered prior to and following the visit to Condon, and from questionnaires completed by university and Condon High School students, as well as Condon teachers participating in the inservice. The semantic differential was based on the concepts of rural schools, teaching, myself as teacher, and high school student. Scales were drawn from evaluation, potency, and activity dimensions. Means pre and post are presented in Table I.

Table I Semantic Differential: Means Pre and Post

	Evaluative		Potency		Activity	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Rural School	5.49	5.98	4.61	5.21	4.81	5.36
Teaching	5.78	6.17	5.42	5.74	4.65	4.64
Myself as Teacher	5.61	5.50	5.35	5.33	4.44	4.64
High School Student	5.33	6.02	5.31	5.56	4.33	4.41

The sematic differential scales were scored on a basis of 1 low, 7 high with three scales each for the activity and potency dimension and four scales for the evaluative dimension. Increases were noted for the activity, potency, and evaluative dimensions for the concept "High School Student;" for the activity dimension for "Myself as a Teacher;" for the potency and evaluative dimension of "Teaching;" and for all dimensions for "Rural Schools." The most dramatic gains occurred for the evaluative dimensions of "High School Student" and "Teaching" and for all dimensions for "Rural Schools." Our students apparently viewed rural schools differently and in a more positive manner following their experience and also gained a new and more positive view of the students. It is interesting to note the decrease in score for the evaluative dimension of "Myself as a Teacher." Facing the real classroom may well have caused some students to think more carefully about their chosen profession. There is informal data to support this in that three students reported following their visit to Condon that they were probably not going to continue their training programs and that the experience had been valuable for them because it helped them reach a personally significant decision.

Data collected in questionnaires indicated that the experiment was an overwhelming success. In questionnaires administered to the Condon High School students the overall experience was rated high and the quality of instruction judged good to excellent. Every high school student claimed (s)he would like to do it again next year. They recommended only increasing the length of the college student field experience to a full week. When queried about recommending the class to their friends, the college students all replied in the affirmative. On a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent

their overall rating of the class and accompanying field experience was 4.85. When asked what they would change, they, too, suggested making the field experience longer. Also, they advised increasing preparation time. This recommendation may have grown from two others also recurring in response to the questionnaire: (1) contact Condon teachers sooner and improve the quality of that communication (i.e. get more detailed information), and (2) have the class meet more often before the field experience. One student teacher made several suggestions on the last page of his journal; not surfacing on the questionnaire was the idea for a seminar after school that included student teachers and Condon teachers and allowed more formal interaction between the two (coaching duties may have prohibited this, had it been attempted), and the desire for more time to observe other classes. In response to a quesion regarding sequencing of the field-based class, the students' voice split between first education course, and experience after practicum and prior to student teaching. Finally, Condon teachers favorably assessed the three day inservice provided by the graduate studdents. Informal feedback from the teachers identified the regret that they were not able to observe some of the teaching taking place in their classrooms.

An interview with the principal, Arnim Freeman, revealed his enthusiasm for the program. Citing the informal feedback he had received from high school students and parents, he felt that the experience was good for all involved. He hoped that the involvement of the university students at Condon High School would revive interest in small schools. Finally he indicated that he would like to see it happen again, but that other small schools should have a chance.

Although the success of the "Condon Experience" was no doubt largely a factor of the particular students and high school faculty involved there seems to be sufficient evidence to suggest that the model itself represents a viable technique for introducing students to the profession in general and specifically to the opportunities of the rural school. University undergraduate and graduate students had the opportunity to put theory into practice in a real, not simulated setting, while Condon students experienced a change of face and pace in their learning activities, and their teachers enjoyed a rare opportunity for staff development.